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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000992

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KWMN](#) [BO](#)
SUBJECT: VITAL VOICES PARTICIPANTS DISCUSS SEMINAR WITH
AMBASSADOR

Classified By: Charge Jonathan Moore for reason 1.4 (d).

Summary

1. (C) Ambassador met with participants of a summit held recently by Vital Voices in Ukraine. The conference, "Vital Voices of Eurasia: A Leadership Summit for Women and Girls," took place in Kyiv October 14-18 and highlighted successful practices that women leaders have undertaken to advance the region socially, politically, and economically. Participants described to Ambassador their experiences at the summit, and outlined the troubles they face as civil society and business leaders in Belarus. End summary.

Six NGO Leaders Discuss Summit Experience

2. (C) Of the nine Belarusian participants in the Kyiv summit, six met with Ambassador November 26 for a debriefing. They included Galina Swartz, Director of Hope and Homes International, an NGO that helps disabled children; Galina Tyurina, Coordinator of La Strada's Anti-Human Trafficking hotline; Alla Sapezhinskaya, Head of the Business Women's Club "Bona"; Nina Stuzhinskaya, Head of the All-Belarusian Women's League; Alena Anisim, Head of the Minsk Branch of the Belarusian Language Society; and Irina Zhikar, Chair of the Organization of Working Women. Participants stated that the Kyiv summit was beneficial in building ties with similar organizations outside Belarus and described insights reached as a result of the event.

Exploring NGO-Business Contacts

3. (C) Galina Tyurina of La Strada stated that she discussed exploring business sponsorships for her organization, and exchanged ideas with NGO leaders from other countries more experienced with business-NGO cooperation. As a result of discussions at the summit, she now plans to approach Microsoft and other high-tech companies to secure in-kind donations. Business sponsorship for NGOs is a relatively new idea in Belarus, and one that faces significant obstacles. Government entities as a rule deeply distrust NGOs, and businesses fear jeopardizing their relationship with the authorities. In addition, the Belarusian tax structure does not provide benefits to companies making such donations.

Greetings, Earthlings - Delegates From Another Planet

4. (C) Irina Zhikar of the Organization for Working Women pointed out that speaking to delegates from around Europe highlighted the contrast between the restrictive working environment for NGOs within Belarus compared to that in other

European countries. She stated that she felt like she had "come from another planet, since none of the other delegates have to deal with the kind of situation we have in Belarus." Participants generally chose to avoid further discussion of political subjects, though they did briefly debate the possibility of limited collaboration with authorities, if only at the local level, in non-controversial areas such as children's welfare.

Building Contacts With the Outside World

15. (C) All of the delegates expressed the sentiment that the conference was most useful in helping to build international contacts, and acknowledged the importance of developing strategic partnerships with organizations outside Belarus. Galina Swartz is now planning a joint project with an organization in Poland, and Nina Stuzhinskaya plans to establish ties with NGOs in Smolensk and Moscow to combat child pornography. Both potential projects are a result of contacts made at the summit. Participants also agreed that the conference provided a valuable opportunity to network with each other as Belarusian colleagues, and stated that future Embassy-sponsored meetings for Belarusian women leaders on targeted topics would be helpful.

Comment

16. (C) Overall, the participants were extremely positive about their experiences at the Vital Voices Summit in Kyiv, particularly with the prospect of forging ties with organizations outside Belarus. Becoming more familiar with Western practices like corporate sponsorship is an important outcome of the summit, and such exchanges of ideas are

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especially important to civil society leaders in Belarus, where creative problem solving is necessary to deal with excessive government restrictions and suspicion.
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